DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 394 785 RC 020 584

AUTHOR Prater, Greg; And Others
TITLE The Impact on Navajo Mothers Becoming Special Education Teachers.
SPONS AGENCY Special Education Programs (ED/OSERS), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE Mar 96
CONTRACT H029B50069
NOTE 5p.; In: Rural Goals 2000: Building Programs That Work; see RC 020 545.
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *American Indian Education; College Students; Family Influence; Higher Education; *Mothers; *Navajo (Nation); *Nontraditional Students; *Preservice Teacher Education; Reservation American Indians; Special Education Teachers; Student Adjustment; *Student Attitudes; Student Experience; Teacher Education Programs

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the impact that participating in a teacher preparation program has had on Navajo mothers. Mothers play a very central role in Navajo culture, and such impacts, both positive and negative, are important not only to program participants, but also to those working in Indian communities. Informal surveys were conducted with 20 Navajo mothers enrolled in the Rural Special Education Project (RSEP), a program that focuses on recruiting Native American students and on preparing students to be special education teachers in Indian schools in rural and remote areas. All RSEP participants (Native and Anglo) live in or around Kayenta (located on the Navajo Reservation in northeastern Arizona) during the program. Survey questions examined such areas as student organization of time for family and study, family obligations, coping with stress, obstacles related to being an older student and having lost academic skills, influence of home environment, advice for future RSEP students, student strategies for getting through the program, and effects of educational experiences on student's quest to become a teacher. Most mothers said that family was their first priority. Other responses focused on the importance of an understanding spouse and family, time management and organization, determination and commitment to the program, and the support given to students by local teachers and administrators. (SV)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

DIANE MONTGOMERY

(PARENT)

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Dr. Greg Prater
Dr. Susan Miller
Susie Kinlacheeny
Fern Seaton
Carlie Kescoli
Mary Harrison
Teri Parrish
Northern Arizona University, Flagstaff, Arizona
Kayenta Unified School District, Kayenta, Arizona

ED 394 785

THE IMPACT ON NAVAJO MOTHERS BECOMING SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS

Introduction

Within the Navajo culture, Navajo families are traced through the mother. They are matrilineal women who are extremely important in the society. Clans and the clan system are the stability that hold families together. The various relationships in the Navajo clan system provides strength and understanding to Navajo people. The family is the heart of all Navajo life and children are looked upon as "riches and jewels" in the culture. Navajo children are considered as precious as gold in the culture. Children will lead the Navajo Nation in the future and protect the proud traditions of Navajo people. For these reasons, it is very important that children are exposed to Navajo language, traditions, and culture.

In this paper we discuss the impact that participating in teacher preparation programs has had on Navajo mothers. Given the very central role Navajo mothers play in the culture, we wondered what impacts, if any, did participation in a specially designed teacher preparation program have on participants. We speculated that these impacts, both positive and negative, might not only be important and of significance to the project participants, but also important to others who are working or about to work in Indian communities. We have provided a brief overview of the Rural Special Education Project (RSEP) and findings from surveys and interviews completed by Navajo women in the fall of 1995.

Context of the Project

Kayenta is located on the Navajo reservation in Northeastern Arizona, 20 miles from the Utah border. The Navajo reservation is the largest Indian reservation in the United States, with 25,000 square miles of reservation land. The Navajo Nation extends across Arizona, New Mexico, and Utah and is approximately the size of West Virginia. The estimated population of the Navajo tribe is 300,000 people according to the 1995 census. Despite the size of the Navajo Nation, Kayenta continues to be a small community, with about 6,000 inhabitants. The population of Kayenta is an estimated 90% Navajo Native Americans.

The Rural Special Education Project

The Rural Special Education Project (RSEP) was started in the fall of 1992. The purpose of the project was to prepare teachers for service in rural and remote areas. A particular focus was on the preparation of Indian people for service in Indian schools. The RSEP is a partnership between the Kayenta Unified School District (KUSD) and Northern Arizona University's Center for Excellence in Education.

In the past three years, 48 students have graduated from the RSEP program. This figure consists of 22 Anglo participants and 26 Navajo Native American participants. Currently, six

RC 020584

Anglo students are enrolled and nine Navajo Native American students. All participants of the RSEP program live in or around Kayenta.

Need for Teachers In Rural Areas

In 1991, only 9.5% of all bachelor's degrees in education were earned in special education. Though the need for special educators is great throughout the country, there is an even greater need within rural areas. Rural areas share a common problem with recruitment and retention of teachers. In a recent Comprehensive System of Personnel Development (CPSD, 1994) study conducted by the Arizona Department of Education, special education directors were asked to note any general concerns they had about recruitment and retention of special education personnel. Seventy-three percent of rural administrators felt that the recruitment and retention of special education teachers was a "significant problem." Due to the lack of experience of living in rural communities, especially among Indian Reservations, many schools find it difficult to recruit and retain qualified special educators. Within some rural areas, there is a turnover rate of 100% for non-native teachers. Many of the problems stem from culture shock, language barriers, homesickness and from a complete change from previous lifestyles. As a result, minimally qualified teachers are employed to work in special education classrooms (CSPD, 1994).

Method

The primary method of data collection consisted of results from informal surveys. The survey questions were generated by Navajo Native American mothers who are enrolled in the RSEP Program. A total of 20 individuals were surveyed. The targeted group consisted of randomly selected female teachers in the KUSD. All had completed a degree when raising a family. Listed below are the nine questions asked in the surveys.

Survey and Interview Questions

1. How did you organize your time between children, spouse and your classes?
2. How did you cope with your family obligations?
3. How did you deal with stress?
4. In pursuing your college degree, there were obstacles that we all face. Explain the following if it applied to you:
   a) Older student verses a younger student going back to school later in life.
   b) Academic Skills
   c) Stable home environment
5. Was RSEP Program worth taking and would you try it again?(Optional)
6. What advice would you give to a student enrolling in the RSEP? (Optional)
7. What strategies did you use to go through the program?
8. How has your personal experience with the educational system aided you in your quest to become a teacher?
9. Are there things that you have not mentioned that have served as barriers in becoming a teacher?

Result

The surveys and interviews were analyzed and interpreted by the Navajo Native American students in the RSEP program.

In response to question one: How did you organize your tie between children and spouse and your classes? Many of the responses from mothers indicated that they had to pay special attention

to time management and have an understanding and patient spouse. Examples of specific quotes are as follows:

- I invested in an organizer and jotted down my time needed for studying, homework, deadlines, and family activities.
- My husband and I juggled time between his job and my classes to be home with the children.

In response to question two: How did you cope with your family obligations? The most common response obtained from mothers was that family was their first priority. Examples of specific quotes are as follows:

- My family always comes first, afterwards things just seem to fall into place.
- It's mandatory that I made time especially for my kids and spouse.

In response to questions three: How did you deal with stress? Many of the responses to stressors dealt with exercising and a positive outlook. Example of specific quotes are as follows:

- I exercised a lot and did a lot of jogging... jogging, aerobics, talking to friends, and a positive outlook.

In response to question four: In pursuing your college degree, there are obstacles that we all face. What were these obstacles? Responses included:

a) Older students verses a younger student going back to school.
- I was an older student and younger students were sharper and quicker.
- Advantage of being older was having endurance and in knowing your priorities.

b) Academic Skills
- Not familiar with technology and high expectations.
- It takes time to regain some of the skills that you used to have in high school.

c) Stable home environment
- Understanding from spouse and children
- Learn to work together for success, understanding husband.

In response to question six: What advice would you give to a student enrolling in the RSEP? Many responses to this question consisted of commitment to the program, organization of home and school obligations, and time management. Quotes included:

- In any school and [in the RSEP], all it takes is self discipline, determination. Be organized and take things one at a time.
- I went on self discipline, organization, [and] determination. Take things one at a time. Do not procrastinate. Anyone can work hard once you are committed.

In response to question seven: What strategies did you use to go through the program? Many responses were planning ahead, commitment, home and school obligations, management and remembering who you are. Examples of specific replies are:

- Patience, understanding, support from family and time management...

- Mental and physical harmony

In response to question eight: How has your personal experience with the educational system aided you in your quest to become a teacher? Responses to this question included a desire to work with children and support from administrators. Replies included:

- Going to primary, elementary, middle school, and high school, within these departments I had some superb models.
- We received support from our school administrators [superintendent, principals and director of special education]
- Our main support comes from our lead teachers, whom we work with daily. They have been patient and understanding.

In response to question nine: Are there things that you have mentioned that have served as barriers in becoming a teachers? Many responses include, finances, child care, gaining confidence, self-esteem, and learning new ways.

Conclusion

We realize that our data are limited. However, we feel that there should be some record of the issues that are encountered by Navajo mothers when they are enrolled in teacher training program. As Navajo women we are very proud of our heritage and culture. We feel that by obtaining our university degrees and becoming teachers we will serve as role models for our students. Also, we will help insure the preservation of the culture on the great Navajo Nation.

This paper was supported in part by Personnel Preparation Grants No. H029B50069 from the United States Department of Education Office of Special Education Programs.